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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000182

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: THIS COUNTRY IS NOT WITHOUT AN OWNER

Classified By: Consul General Sharon A. Wiener for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Consul General called on Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) Chairman Can Paker on April 1, the day after Turkey's Constitutional Court agreed to hear arguments in the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) closure case. Paker said the secular elite is fighting to preserve their position and perks. Unlike previous battles between the government and the civil (judicial)/military group arrayed against them, Paker could not predict the outcome of this confrontation but he drew attention to a phrase well-known, he said, in Turkey which everyone accepted as true: "This country is not without an owner," referring to the civil/military bureaucracy. End summary.

¶2. (C) The timing of the Consul General's courtesy call on the unreserved TESEV Chairman took place less than 24 hours after Turkey's Constitutional Court placed AKP in jeopardy by agreeing to hear a closure case against the party brought by the country's chief prosecutor. While he couldn't predict the final outcome after anticipated legal and other moves and counter moves, Paker said he was sure of what Turkey's friends in the west and liberals in Turkey should do: fight the closure with every available tool. Turkey, he explained, is in transition from a centralized, statist country to one imbued with the values of liberal democracy. Turkey had been founded with a "civil/military" elite at the core supporting a state apparatus set up to protect them and their cadre, including through special economic set-asides. This structure is now challenged by a new capitalist class that is no longer satisfied with "crumbs from the table" offered by old monopolistic structures. The new class are competitors born of the experience in capitalistic enterprise. The "old guard" will oppose the challenge to their privilege with everything they have, said Paker. "This country is not without an owner." The lightly coded sentence meaning the civil and military bureaucracy owns Turkey is regarded as so descriptive of fact that no one in Turkey finds the statement awkward, he claimed.

¶3. (C) But the fundamental dynamic has changed, according to Paker, since the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War, the U.S. only concerned itself with preserving Turkey's anti-Soviet stance, now, the U.S., as well as the EU, want a democratic Turkey. These external forces are powerful and reinforce internal demands.

¶4. (C) Paker referred to TESEV research that indicates 30 percent of the Turkish population is secular and the remaining 70 percent religious. Among the 70 percent religious, one in seven, or 10 percent of the population, hold extreme nationalist views. Another group of the religious Turks (nine percent of the population), are

extremely religious and support imposition of sharia. Among the overall 30 percent of the population that is secular, one-third, or 10 percent of the population, hold extreme nationalist views that are anti-Europe, anti-U.S. and anti-foreigner. The 50 percent of the population who are religious moderates trade, marry and socially interact with the 20 percent of the population who are moderate seculars, according to the TESEV research. AKP has the potential to unite this 70 percent of the population to defeat efforts to remove what religiously-oriented middle-class Turks have won through continuing social and economic reform. If not AKP, Paker predicted another entity would in time overturn the civil/military bureaucratic elite structure in Turkey.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

15. (C) Paker concedes legal experts diverge in their views of relevant law and practice on whether AKP's bid to modify two articles in the constitution successfully shield it from closure. The possible referendum on these changes, which Paker supports, will represent a very serious moment for Turkey. Before the July 2007 general election in which AKP won nearly 47 percent of the vote, memorable pro-secular rallies were held in Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara and other cities around the country. The AKP and its supporters chose not to respond. But all those attending the pro-secular rallies in the summer of 2007 cannot be counted on to support party closures; AKP can easily turn out street demonstrations that would dwarf the 2007 rallies, especially if they succeed in galvanizing the 70 percent of the population that potentially supports their cause. A rally effort would intensify the already charged atmosphere and could even result in violence. But Paker supports taking that chance.

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16. (C) AKP missteps since the July elections resulted from the party's focus on upcoming municipal elections in March 2009, according to Paker. Hoping to co-opt the nationalism-motivated voter in 2009, AKP relegated continuing economic and free expression reform to the back burner. Had AKP reignited its program of transformational reform on July 23 following their resounding victory at national polls, Paker maintains elites would not have dared touch the party now due to the support the AKP would have drawn from the EU.

17. (C) Unable to predict a linear unfolding of events, Paker's research leads him to optimism. Eighty-five percent of Turks believe they are middle class and 60 percent say they're fighting for advancement through diligence and hard work, not corruption and sleaze. Turkey looks much more like the U.S. than geographically closer countries like Russia or especially France (darling of the civil/military bureaucracy for its enthrallment with elitist ascendancy.) Turkey's misfortune is that it is located in Anatolia and not Mexico. The right move for the United States now would be to signify clear support for the aspirations of the Turkish middle class, Paker argues. Delayed backing will be seen in the future as unprincipled and not worthy of respect. These Anatolian tigers, fostering explosive production resulting in new centers of learning and further economic development, will not be deterred from their goal of free market economic rules and equal treatment under the law. There will be ups and downs, Paker predicted, in this desperate struggle, but the long-term outcome for Turkey, if not AKP, is secure.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

18. (C) Paker believes Tayyip Erdogan should do everything he can to win the struggle. Paker claimed he'd succeeded in convincing the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TUSIAD) to state that closing political parties is not a solution to current divisions. If it were up to Paker, he would advise the Prime Minister to use public

demonstrations to influence the outcome, even knowing this could risk confrontation; he did not know if the PM would take this route. Prompted, Paker agreed there were means of building bridges to unite disparate groups. Bankers, businessmen, teachers, people from the professions such as law and medicine, represented in the 51/20 majority could unite to build societal bridges with the capacity to defeat the "frenzied, illogical and destructive" plans of the civil/military bureaucracy.

19. (C) Comment. Paker's views are a forceful echo of those held by many conservative liberals. A child of the privileged class, Paker is convinced of the rightness of the liberal ideals of liberty, equal treatment under law, freedom of expression and choice. Though he factually describes sociological phenomena regarding the debate over the headscarf, possibly a trip-wire that led to the closure indictment, he also downplays the concerns of those like Lieutenant Colonel Vedat Zamir, public information officer with the NATO Rapid Deployable Corps in Istanbul who told us March 13 "the military is fighting radical Islam." For example, Paker declined to comment on where he thought the Fethullah Gulen movement fit into Turkey's political landscape, claiming he had no research results on which to base any judgment. End comment.

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